



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Public Health Determination Regarding an Exception for
Unaccompanied Noncitizen Children from the Order Suspending
the Right to Introduce Certain Persons from Countries Where
a Quarantinable Communicable Disease Exists**

AGENCY: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a component of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), announces an Order excepting unaccompanied noncitizen children (UC) from the Order Suspending the Right to Introduce Certain Persons from Countries Where a Quarantinable Communicable Disease Exists, issued on October 13, 2020 (October Order). CDC finds that, at this time, there is appropriate infrastructure in place to protect the children, caregivers, and local communities from elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission as a result of the introduction of UC, and U.S. healthcare resources are not significantly impacted by providing UC necessary care.

CDC believes the COVID-19-related public health concerns associated with UC introduction can be adequately addressed without the UC being subject to the October Order, thereby permitting the government to better address the humanitarian challenges for these children. Therefore, CDC is fully excepting UC from the October Order, and the Notice regarding the temporary exception of UC published February 17, 2021 is hereby superseded.

DATES: This Order went into effect July 16, 2021.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

As part of government efforts to mitigate the introduction, transmission, and spread of COVID-19, CDC issued the October Order¹, suspending the right to introduce certain persons into the United States (U.S.) from countries or

¹ Order Suspending the Right to Introduce Certain Persons from Countries Where a Quarantinable Communicable Disease Exists, 85 FR 65806 (Oct. 16, 2020). The October Order replaced the Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, issued on March 20, 2020. 85 Fed. Reg. 17060 (Mar. 26, 2020); Extension of Order Under Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act; Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons From Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, 85 Fed. Reg. 22424 (Apr. 22, 2020); Amendment and Extension of Order Under Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act; Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, 85 FR 31503 (May 26, 2020).

places where a quarantinable communicable disease exists to protect the public's health from an increase in risk of the introduction of COVID-19. The Order applied specifically to certain noncitizens as defined² who would otherwise be introduced into a congregate setting in land or coastal ports of entry (POE) or Border Patrol stations at or near the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico. On February 17, 2021³, CDC published a notice announcing the temporary exception from expulsion of unaccompanied noncitizen children⁴ (UC) encountered in the United States from the October Order.⁵

As detailed in the Order, CDC has reviewed the current situation with regards to the COVID-19 public health emergency and UC in immigrations facilities and has concluded that it is appropriate to fully except UC from the October Order given the measures in place to prevent and mitigate transmission of COVID-19 in this population. CDC finds that the robust network UC care facilities operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a

² See 85 FR 65806, 65807.

³ Notice of Temporary Exception from Expulsion of Unaccompanied Noncitizen Children Encountered in the United States Pending Forthcoming Public Health Determination, 86 FR 9942 (Feb. 17, 2021).

⁴ CDC's understanding is that this class of individuals is similar to or the same as those individuals who would be considered "unaccompanied alien children" (see 6 U.S.C. 279) for purposes of HHS ORR custody, were DHS to make the necessary immigration determinations under Title 8 of the U.S. Code.

⁵ Notice of Temporary Exception from Expulsion of Unaccompanied Noncitizen Children Encountered in the United States Pending Forthcoming Public Health Determination, 86 FR 9942 (Feb. 17, 2021).

component of HHS, the testing and medical care available therein, as well as COVID-19 mitigation protocols including vaccination for personnel and eligible UC, result in very low likelihood that processing UC in accordance with existing immigration procedures under Title 8 of the U.S. Code will result in undue strain on the U.S. healthcare system or healthcare resources. Moreover, UC released to a vetted sponsor or placed in a permanent ORR shelter do not pose a significant level of risk for COVID-19 spread into the community because they are released after having undergone testing, quarantine and/or isolation, and vaccination when possible, and their sponsors are provided with appropriate medical and public health direction.

A copy of the Order is provided below, and a copy of the signed Order can be found at

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/pdf/NoticeUnaccompaniedChildren.pdf>.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)**

**ORDER UNDER SECTIONS 362 & 365 OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
ACT
(42 U.S.C. §§ 265, 268) and 42 CFR 71.40**

**PUBLIC HEALTH DETERMINATION
REGARDING AN EXCEPTION FOR
UNACCOMPANIED NONCITIZEN CHILDREN FROM THE
ORDER SUSPENDING THE RIGHT TO INTRODUCE
CERTAIN PERSONS FROM COUNTRIES
WHERE A QUARANTINABLE COMMUNICABLE DISEASE EXISTS**

As part of U.S. government efforts to mitigate the introduction, transmission, and spread of COVID-19, CDC issued an Order on March 20, 2020 (March Order), later replaced on October 13, 2020 (October Order),⁶ suspending the right to introduce⁷ certain persons into the United States from countries or places where a quarantinable communicable disease⁸ exists in order to protect the public health from an increase in risk of the introduction of COVID-19. The Orders applied specifically to covered noncitizens⁹ who would otherwise be introduced into a

⁶ Order Suspending the Right to Introduce Certain Persons from Countries Where a Quarantinable Communicable Disease Exists, 85 Fed. Reg. 65806 (Oct. 16, 2020). The October Order replaced the Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, issued on March 20, 2020, extended on April 20, 2020, and amended May 19, 2020. Notice of Order Under Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, 85 Fed. Reg. 17060 (Mar. 26, 2020); Extension of Order Under Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act; Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons From Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, 85 Fed. Reg. 22424 (Apr. 22, 2020); Amendment and Extension of Order Under Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act; Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, 85 Fed. Reg. 31503 (May 26, 2020).

⁷ “Suspension of the right to introduce” means to cause the temporary cessation of the effect of any law, rule, decree, or order pursuant to which a person might otherwise have the right to be introduced or seek introduction into the United States. 42 CFR 71.40(b)(5).

⁸ Quarantinable communicable diseases are any of the communicable diseases listed in Executive Order, as provided under § 361 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. § 264). 42 CFR 71.1. The list of quarantinable communicable diseases currently includes cholera, diphtheria, infectious tuberculosis, plague, smallpox, yellow fever, viral hemorrhagic fevers (Lassa, Marburg, Ebola, Crimean-Congo, South American, and others not yet isolated or named), severe acute respiratory syndromes (including Middle East respiratory syndrome and COVID-19), and influenza caused by novel or reemergent influenza viruses that are causing, or have the potential to cause, a pandemic. *See* Exec. Order 13295, 68 Fed. Reg. 17255 (Apr. 4, 2003), as amended by Exec. Order 13375, 70 Fed. Reg. 17299 (Apr. 1, 2005) and Exec. Order 13674, 79 Fed. Reg. 45671 (July 31, 2014).

⁹ This Order is using the term “covered noncitizens” to have the same meaning as “covered aliens” in the October Order. *See* October Order, 85 Fed. Reg. 65806, 65807 (defining “covered aliens” as “persons traveling from Canada or Mexico (regardless of their country of origin) who would otherwise be introduced into a congregate setting in a land or coastal Port of Entry (POE) or Border Patrol station at or near the United States borders with Canada or Mexico,” subject to certain exceptions. These persons “would typically be aliens seeking to enter the United States at POEs who do not have proper travel documents, aliens whose entry is otherwise contrary to law,

congregate setting in land or coastal ports of entry (POE) or Border Patrol stations at or near the U.S. borders¹⁰ with Canada and Mexico. On February 17, 2021, CDC published a notice¹¹ (February Notice) announcing the temporary exception of unaccompanied noncitizen children from the October Order; the February Notice stated that CDC would complete a public health assessment and publish an additional notice or a modified Order. As explained below, CDC has concluded that it is appropriate to except unaccompanied noncitizen children¹² (UC) from the October Order given the measures in place to prevent and mitigate transmission of COVID-19 in this population.

Under the March and October Orders, UC were included as part of the covered noncitizens for whom the right of introduction into the United States was suspended; however, UC largely have been excepted from the application of the Order, first pursuant to judicial action,¹³ and later under

and aliens who are apprehended near the border seeking to unlawfully enter the United States between POEs.”).

¹⁰ When U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) partner agencies encounter noncitizens off the coast closely adjacent to the land borders, it transfers the noncitizens for processing in POE or Border Patrol stations closest to the encounter. Absent the October Order, such noncitizens would be held in the same congregate settings and holding facilities as any encounters along the land border, resulting in similar public health concerns related to the introduction, transmission, and spread of COVID-19.

¹¹ Notice of Temporary Exception from Expulsion of Unaccompanied Noncitizen Children Encountered in the United States Pending Forthcoming Public Health Determination, 86 Fed. Reg. 9942 (Feb. 17, 2021).

¹² CDC’s understanding is that this class of individuals is similar to or the same as those individuals who would be considered “unaccompanied alien children” (see 6 U.S.C. § 279) for purposes of HHS ORR custody, were DHS to make the necessary immigration determinations under Title 8 of the U.S. Code.

¹³ Dkt. No. 80, *P.J.E.S. v. Mayorkas et al.*, No. 1:20-cv-02245 (D.D.C. Nov. 18, 2020).

the February Notice. As a result, since November 18, 2020, UC have generally been processed under regular immigration processes under Title 8 of the U.S. Code and therefore referred from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for care and custody, according to the usual legal framework governing such referrals.¹⁴ Pursuant to these requirements, UC encountered in the United States by CBP generally are transferred to ORR within 72 hours of intake at a POE or Border Patrol station.¹⁵ Upon transfer to ORR custody, UC are transported to facilities that operate under cooperative agreements or contracts with HHS and must meet ORR requirements to ensure a high level of quality, child-focused care by appropriately trained staff. ORR operates 210 facilities in 22 states. At these facilities, case managers work to identify and ultimately place UC with vetted sponsors (usually family members within the United States).

Beginning in mid-2020, the United States began experiencing an increase in the number of UC arriving daily at the

¹⁴ See 8 U.S.C. § 1232; Stipulated Settlement Agreement, *Flores v. Reno*, No. CV 85-cv-4544 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 17, 1997).

¹⁵ 8 U.S.C. § 1232(b)(3).

southern border. By February 2021, due to the record numbers of transfers to ORR, UC being held in CBP custody awaiting ORR transfer increased due to a lack of available space in ORR facilities. ORR and other government agencies responded to the influx of UC by rapidly expanding capacity and developing robust, safe COVID-19 protocols in consultation with CDC.

In conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and with the assistance of the Department of Defense, HHS and ORR opened temporary intake facilities along the U.S. southern border and in the interior to add capacity. A total of 14 Emergency Intake Sites (EIS)¹⁶ were opened across the United States. CDC assisted ORR by sending medical epidemiologists and other public health professionals to provide technical assistance on COVID-19 mitigation protocols. ORR now has a capacity of over 20,000 beds; currently, over 15,100 children are in its care. ORR has successfully processed and discharged over 55,000 UC since January 20, 2021. The successful efforts to expand capacity for UC have resulted in sufficient capacity at ORR sites—both along the border and in the interior—significantly reducing the length of time that UC remain in

¹⁶ EIS are intended to be a temporary measure providing a standard of care consistent with the best interest of children during an emergency situation. When fully operational with appropriate staffing and basic medical resources, EIS provide a safer, less crowded environment where UC are cared for, processed as quickly as possible, and are either released to a sponsor or transferred to an appropriate ORR facility for longer-term care. When no longer necessary, EIS facilities are demobilized.

CBP custody. As of July 13, 2021, the current average time a UC remained in CBP custody before transferring to ORR custody was 26 hours, and four UC have been in CBP custody for over 72 hours.¹⁷ This represents a substantial improvement from early 2021.¹⁸ While the number of UC encountered may remain at elevated levels, expanded ORR capacity and improved processing methods have resulted in UC remaining in CBP custody for shorter periods of time.

The processes in place at the EIS and at ORR's regular facilities afford sufficient resources and time to identify SARS-CoV-2 cases and implement environmental controls to attenuate the risk of COVID-19 infection and spread.¹⁹ With CDC's assistance and guidance, ORR also has implemented COVID-19 testing regimes for UC in its care and continues to practice other mitigation measures to further prevent and curtail any transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus among UC in its care. These strategies include universal and

¹⁷ HHS Executive Leadership Information Brief (internal document). Published July 12, 2021.

¹⁸ For comparison, on March 29, 2021, nearly 5,500 UC were in CBP custody, with 3,540 of those UC in custody for longer than 72 hours; as of March 31, 2021, the average time in CBP custody for UC was 131 hours.

¹⁹ Specifically, ORR currently uses the following COVID-19 protocols for UC at EIS: UC are tested for COVID-19 by CBP prior to being transported to an EIS and then are also tested upon arrival to EIS. UC are required to quarantine for the first 7 days after admission to an EIS and can be released from quarantine on the morning of day 8 if they remain asymptomatic and had a negative COVID-19 test in the 48 hours prior. In addition to testing at admission and during quarantine, UC are routinely tested during their stay at EIS (e.g., every three days), and any UC that develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection is immediately tested. UC who test positive for COVID-19 are required to be isolated for 10 days from the date the positive test was collected, or 10 days from the date of symptom onset if asymptomatic. Contact tracing is conducted whenever anyone tests positive for COVID-19; UC exposed to COVID-19 are quarantined for seven days, tested on the 5th, 6th, or 7th day of their quarantine, and are released upon receiving a negative test result. ORR has also issued similar COVID-19 guidance to licensed facilities.

proper wearing of masks, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, cleaning and disinfection, improved ventilation, staff vaccination, and cohorting UC according to their COVID-19 test status. Per CDC recommendation, ORR conducts serial testing of staff to allow early detection of a possible outbreak.²⁰ ORR contract staff working in facilities serving UC are encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.²¹ As advised by CDC, ORR restricts movement of unvaccinated personnel between facilities to reduce potential outbreaks resulting from transfer of unvaccinated staff between shelters. These measures help reduce the spread of COVID-19 among UC prior to being introduced into U.S. communities.

In addition to the mitigation measures at EIS and ORR facilities outlined above, following FDA expansion of the emergency use authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for adolescents 12 to 15 years of age, CDC provided updated recommendations to ORR regarding the vaccination of UC ages 12 and older. ORR subsequently approved the administration of COVID-19 vaccine for age-

²⁰ In ORR facilities where the risk of transmission is moderate to high, public health officials working collaboratively with ORR facilities can determine the appropriateness of offering screening and repeat testing of randomly selected asymptomatic staff and children at the facility, as feasible, to identify cases and prevent secondary transmission.

²¹ Additional criteria (e.g., continued symptom monitoring and correct and consistent wearing of masks) should be met by ORR as outlined on CDC's website. *See* Science Brief: Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html> (last updated Dec. 2, 2020).

eligible children. Under ORR care, children ages 12 and over are offered a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible, as long as there are no contraindications and vaccination does not delay unification of UC with sponsors. Of the total population of UC in ORR care, approximately 90% are eligible for vaccination and, as of July 12, 2021, ORR has administered at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to 10,124 UC. CDC considers these vaccination efforts to be a critical risk reduction measure that supports exempting UC from the October Order.

Although 8,435 UC have tested positive for COVID-19 while at ORR shelters during the period of March 24, 2020 to July 8, 2021, 8,081 of those UC testing positive have successfully completed medical isolation, with few requiring medical treatment. Similarly, 6,590 COVID-19 cases have been reported among 14 EIS as of July 7, 2021; however only 14 (0.5%) of the UC in this group have required hospitalization (including two severe cases requiring intensive care). These numbers indicate that the risk of overburdening the local healthcare systems by UC presenting with severe COVID-19 disease remains low. Based on the robust network of ORR care facilities and the testing and medical care available therein, as well as COVID-19 mitigation protocols including vaccination for personnel and eligible UC, there is very low likelihood

that processing UC in accordance with existing Title 8 procedures will result in undue strain on the U.S. healthcare system or healthcare resources. Moreover, UC released to a vetted sponsor or placed in a permanent ORR shelter do not pose a significant level of risk for COVID-19 spread into the community because they are released after having undergone testing, quarantine and/or isolation, and vaccination when possible, and their sponsors are provided with appropriate medical and public health direction.

CDC thus finds that, at this time,²² there is appropriate infrastructure in place to protect the children, caregivers, and local communities from elevated risk of COVID-19 transmission as a result of the introduction of UC, and U.S. healthcare resources are not significantly impacted by providing UC necessary care. CDC believes the COVID-19-related public health concerns associated with UC introduction can be adequately addressed without UC being subject to the October Order, thereby permitting the government to better address the humanitarian challenges for these children. Based on the foregoing, CDC is fully excepting UC from the October Order,²³ and the February Notice is hereby superseded. This Order shall be

²² This situation could change based on an increased influx of UC, changes in COVID-19 infection dynamics among UC, or unforeseen reductions in housing capacity.

²³ See 86 Fed. Reg. 9942.

immediately effective. I consulted with DHS and other federal departments as needed before I issued this Order and requested that DHS continue to aid in the enforcement of this Order because CDC does not have the capability, resources, or personnel needed to do so.²⁴

This Order is not a rule subject to notice and comment under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). Even if it were, notice and comment and a delay in effective date are not required because there is good cause to dispense with prior public notice and the opportunity to comment on this Order and a delayed effective date. Given the public health emergency caused by COVID-19 and the highly unpredictable nature of its transmission and spread, it would be impracticable and contrary to public health practices and the public interest to delay the issuing and effective date of this Order with respect to UC. In addition, because this Order concerns the ongoing discussions with Canada and Mexico on how best to control COVID-19 transmission over our shared borders, it directly "involve[s] . . . a . . . foreign affairs function of the United States." 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(1). Notice and comment and a delay in effective date would not be required for that reason as well.

Authority

²⁴ 42 U.S.C. 268; 42 CFR 71.40(d).

The authority for this Order is Sections 362 and 365 of the Public Health Service Act (42 USC 265, 268) and 42 CFR 71.40.

Dated: July 19, 2021

Sherri Berger

Chief of Staff,

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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